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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, November 1, 1933.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "Another Food Fad." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
U.S.D.A.

--ooOoo--

Instead of my usual advice to housekeepers, I'm going to start out today with some good sound financial advice to any men present.

If you want to make some easy money -- and don't care how; if you want to make a comfortable living and haven't a conscience; if you want to persuade a lot of trusting women to empty their pocketbooks in your hands, I'll tell you one of the surest ways of doing it. Start a new system of eating for health, a new diet plan to cure all ailments. Never mind the facts of nutrition. Never mind whether you have had any scientific training. Just get a lot of scientific-sounding words together in a lecture, wear your dress suit, rent the rose room at the hotel, talk to your audience in an intimate, sympathetic way, put on a nice bright smile for the ladies, then fill them up with fears about the dangers of their present diet, but tell them how yours will cure their ailments and prevent future trouble. On the side, sell them your books and pamphlets, your health biscuits, violet-ray wafers, vitality pie, or something else. Easy money. Most Americans will buy anything if you can persuade them that it may be good for their health.

Diet faddists, quacks and fakters have been "on the make" for years and years, and they're still going strong. Of course, they change their tune with the times but the chorus is generally much the same. Since the scientists began to study nutrition seriously, since they have discovered certain facts about food in their laboratories, the food faddists have flourished as never before. Think of all the different food enthusiasms that have swept this country in recent years. Of course, we always have the vegetarians, who believe that animal food is the root of all evil. But lately we've had many other faddists. For example, the raw food enthusiasts who believe that cooking is the curse of the race; the vitamin chasers who have deserted their former all-around diet to fill up on yeast, irradiated foods, vitamin concentrates and what not. Oh yes, and the roughage eaters, the bran-and-spinach boys, who believe that refined foods will ruin the country. You can name a lot of others yourself.

Of course, many diet fads have a basis in scientific fact. Perhaps I do need to eat more vegetables and fruits and less meat. Maybe you need more raw food. Many of us would be in better health if we had more vitamins in our diet, or if we ate more roughage. But the point I'm trying to make is that the faddists and quacks carry these ideas to extremes. And extremes are usually foolish, often expensive, sometimes harmful.

You see nutrition is an unfinished science. All sciences are unfinished. Scientists are constantly discovering new facts. Naturally, the man who makes an interesting find is likely to be carried away with enthusiasm for his own discovery and considers it more important than any other fact. That's how many a food fad gets its start. Then again, some doctor may use a new diet successfully for a certain disease. The fact that a feeding system is helpful to sick people is no proof at all that it will be good for a normal, healthy person.

Just now the fashionable diet that is going the rounds has to do with food combinations. It taboos certain food mixtures we've been eating for generations. It advises separating certain classes of foods, segregating them into different meals. This new rule to cure what ails you is: "Never eat protein and starch at the same meal." Where did this fad come from? Well, certain French physicians have reported good results from this diet in special cases of illness. Does that mean that all of us ought to adopt it? No, indeed. But you'd think this diet was going to become a national institution, the way people talk about it at bridge parties and teas. You'll hear that it cured Mrs. So-and-So of this or that trouble. You'll hear that stout Mrs. Somebody Else got back her girlish figure on it. Recently some of our smart magazines have contained articles glorifying this latest diet-invention.

Now please listen to some wise-sounding sentences which appeared in one of these articles. Listen to this if you want to hear the kind of scientific-sounding stuff that actually converts people to weird food practices. Listen-- I'm quoting right from the magazine now: "When a concentrated starch (such as bread, potatoes or a cereal) is eaten, the stomach must be in an alkaline condition to digest it properly. On the other hand, when a protein (such as meat, fish, cheese or eggs) is eaten, acid forms in the stomach for its special digestion. No human stomach can be expected to be acid and alkaline at the same time. When starch and protein meet there during the same meal, fermentation or indigestion results." That's the end of the quotation.

Does anybody believe all that? Yes, actually lots of people take every word in. Yes, and many conscientious housewives spend hours trying to plan lunches that avoid protein and dinners that avoid starch. Well, the joke is on them because the job is practically impossible. Our natural foods contain both starch and protein. You can't pry the two apart. Good examples are beans and peas -- both high in protein and starch. Cereals also contain both of these materials. And even milk which is rich in protein contains a carbohydrate in the form of milk sugar. In spite of those frightening sentences I just read you, starch and protein have been meeting in the human stomach for many thousands of years and meeting pretty successfully. If "fermentation or indigestion results," why aren't we human beings extinct long since? What's more, the digestive juice in the stomach is always acid, but both acid and alkaline digestion can and do go on in the stomach at the same time. The saliva in the mouth which is alkaline starts the digestion of the starch. The digestion of starch may continue in the stomach for some time until the food mixes with the gastric juice which digests protein.

Anyway, the stomach isn't your only digestive organ. Further digestion of both protein and starch takes place in the intestines. There, you see, your digestive apparatus is equipped to take care of food combinations all along the line with no trouble at all.

Instead of worrying about what not to eat, better consider how to work in all the different foods you need and how to make the diet balanced. Better be sure your meals have not only meat and bread and sweets but also a generous supply of vegetables and fruits and milk and eggs. Don't overeat of any one kind of food, particularly the rich hearty foods. There's safety in variety.

Tomorrow: "A Winter Herb Garden."

11/1/33

